



The Twilight Tattoo

Story by PFC Jennifer Lilly

TRADITIONS enable us to recall our past, help us understand the present and prepare us for the challenges of the future. Traditions and customs are particularly important to military organizations, in which morale, leadership and teamwork are important parts of everyday life.

A “tattoo” as a military tradition can be traced from the early 17th century. Most historical accounts say the phrase originated during the 30 Years’ War, when the sounding of a bugle signaled soldiers to return to

their quarters. It was then that tavern owners would call for the taps on the kegs to be turned off by announcing “tattoo.” With time, a “tattoo” referred to the rhythmic beating of a drum and eventually to the outdoor military exercise performed by troops as evening entertainment.

The “Twilight Tattoo” is now traditional entertainment in Washington, D.C., as visitors and residents gather on summer evenings to enjoy the sights and sounds of the live musical performance of the troops of the 3rd U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard) and the U.S. Army Band (Pershing’s Own).

Adding background color to each performance, the military police platoon stands by with the 56 flags of America’s states and territories.

The Tattoo also reminds audiences of the scope and color of Army history, as other soldiers appear in uniforms from previous eras.

PFC Aneisha James, a medical specialist for The Old Guard’s aid station, played the role of a World War II nurse in the 2000 “Twilight Tattoo.” James said her participation in the event was a learning experience that helped her see “how the Army has grown and progressed into what it is today.”

For CPT Abe Usher, The Old Guard’s ceremonies officer, the tattoo serves an important purpose beyond tradition, because it “illustrates the diversity of the Army’s missions today as it celebrates our history.”

For more information visit www.mdw.army.mil. □

